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Baby Reindeer review: Searingly personal work from Richard Gadd feels like a radical gesture



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Review at a glance

They say that patriarchy harms us all; engrained assumptions about gender mean it's not always been easy for male writers and performers to be emotionally truthful about their own vulnerabilities. That's meant that interminable Wikipedia-esque plays or stories where men represent the universal experience of all humanity have been our shared burden. If those writers wish to atone, they should really buy a ticket to see Richard Gadd at work.

After Gadd won Comedy Award in 2016 for *Monkey See Monkey Do*, a unique and unforgettable show about his experience of being sexually assaulted, he now follows up with his debut play – [first seen at this year's Edinburgh Fringe](#) – which lays bare his horrific experiences of being stalked.

Baby Reindeer is the name given to him by Martha, a fortysomething woman whose obsession with Gadd jumps from mildly amusing to unsettling to extremely disturbing. Working a day job at a pub while trying to make it as a comedian, he gives quirky-but-harmless seeming Martha a cup of tea on the house, and things unravel from there. Over the course of five years, she sent him over 40,000 emails, turned up at his house, tormented his partner, and told his parents he'd been in an accident. (No wonder an audience member behind me muttered 'Jesus' at one point.)

Gadd is a dynamic performer, and this one-man show, playfully directed by Jon Brittain, is another must-see. What makes it so compelling is that Gadd never shies away from holding himself to account, sharing his darkest thoughts as he searches for answers. He is self-flagellating about any potential complicity; he wonders if he encouraged Martha. His girlfriend questions him: "Why do you feel the need to flirt with someone who is so clearly vulnerable?" But since he and Martha are never alone together, there's a performative element to his charm; this is, after all, a man who spends his evenings trying to win over rooms of strangers.

Interwoven with interviews with his parents and conversations he had with the police, occasionally Gadd's bursts of rage boil over into unconstrained shouty, swear moments that feel like they serve mainly as personal catharsis. But they are understandable; he was told by the police, who don't take his complaints seriously, that it would be treated differently if he were a woman.

A final moment of tenderness leaves us with the uneasiest of questions; what do you do with the empathy you feel for an abuser? How do you stop it becoming an

excuse? This is searingly honest and personal work that feels like a radical gesture. Gadd is leading the way to creating a new space for men to make a different kind of work. We'll all be better for it.

Until November 9; bushtheatre.co.uk